

A
S E R M O N

Preached before

Her Majesty,

At St. *J A M E S*'s Chapel,

On Sunday, October 28. 1705.

Being the Festival of St. *Simon* and St. *Jude*.

BY

FRANCIS ATTERBURY, D. D.

DEAN of *Carlisle*, and Chaplain in Ordinary to
Her Majesty.

Publiſh'd by Her Majesties Special Command.

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Printed for *Tho. Bennet*, at the *Half-Moon* in St. *Paul's*
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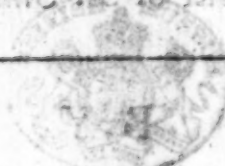
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At St. A M E S Chapel,

On Sunday, October 28. 1702.

Being the Festival of St. Simon and St. Jude.



FRANCIS ATTERBURY, D.D.

Dean of Carlisle, and Chaplain in Ordinary to
Her Majesty.

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L O N D O N :

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SERMON

Preached before the

QUEEN.

LUKE xvi. 31.

*If they hear not Moses and the Prophets,
neither will they be persuaded, though one
rose from the dead.*

THE Happiest of Mankind are often sub-
ject to this great Infirmity, That, over-
looking those solid Blessings which they
already have, they set their Hearts upon some-
what which they want; some untry'd Pleasure, or
Advantage, which if they could but taste, if they
could but obtain, they should then be certainly
and compleatly blest. And yet, no sooner have
they climb'd that Hill, which thus determines

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their View at a distance, but a new Prospect is open'd to them, and they find themselves as far remov'd from the imagin'd Point of Happiness as ever.

In like manner the standing Evidences of the Truth of the Gospel, though in themselves most firm, solid and satisfying, yet make but faint Impressions on the Minds of many Christians, who, after all the old Miracles done by our Saviour and his Apostles, are still ready to demand new ones; to desire, that some special Proof should be given, some extraordinary Application made, to Them in particular: and then they would resign all their Scruples; believe without Doubt, and obey without Reserve. Thus do the Ungodly reason with themselves, but not aright, as the Lips of Truth have assur'd us: for If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the Dead.

The Assertion is our Saviour's, tho' utter'd by him in the Person of *Abraham*, the Father of the Faithful; who, on the account of that Character, is very fitly introduc'd, in the Parable concerning the Rich Man and *Lazarus*, declaring, what Arguments and Motives are most likely to produce in Men that firm, unshaken Faith in God, of which He himself was so illustrious a Pattern.

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The Parable was intended against the Voluptuaries of that Time (Such, as one of the Apostles of this Day, St. Jude, describes throughout his Epistle); Men, who, notwithstanding they profess'd themselves Jews, liv'd like Heathens, dissolutely, without regarding any of the Rules or Restraints of Religion; made the best of this World, and had no Hopes, no Thoughts of Another. Sensual Wits they were, who, tis probable, took pleasure in ridiculing the Notion of a Life to come, and saying scornfully of it, That it was a Dark Invisible State, of which they knew nothing, and could not easily believe much, till they had some more Authentick Accounts of it than as yet had been given them. Might they indeed receive News from thence by an Hand that was to be rely'd on; would any of their old Companions in Vice, who had made the sad Experiment, be so kind as to return and certifie them of what he had learnt; they should readily give up their Assent to so Commanding an Evidence, and suit their Practices to that Perswasion: but, till they saw somewhat of this nature done, they desir'd to be excus'd.

To confute these Vain Reasonings and Pretences, our Saviour made use of that instructive and affecting Parable, which concludes with the Words I have read to you. Therein he
represents

represents the Rich *Epicure*, lifting up his Eyes from the Place of Punishment allotted to him, discerning *Abraham* afar off, and *Lazarus* together with him in Glory; and making this Request, among others, to the Blessed Patriarch, That he would please to send *Lazarus* to his five Brethren, now alive, in order to *testifie unto them, lest they also* (says he) *come into this place of Torment*. Instead of indulging him in his Request for new Evidence, *Abraham* refers him to that which his Brethren already had; *They have Moses and the Prophets* (says he,) *let them hear Them*; they have a standing Revelation of God's Will and their own Duty, which was attested in the most solemn, authentick and credible manner, and is sufficient to influence their Faith and Practice, if they do but attend to it. Not satisfied with this Answer, the Tormented Person again interposes his Opinion, That the Means of Conviction they enjoy'd, though sufficient, yet had not prevail'd; whereas the Expedient he now propos'd, could not fail of Success: *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead, they will repent*. He thought so, but *Abraham* knew otherwise; and therefore shuts up the Discourse with this full and final Resolution of the Case; That, *if they heard not Moses and the Prophets, neither would they be persuaded,*

suaded, though one rose from the Dead. The Meaning of which Words, when cast into a General Proposition, is, That "They, who are "not induc'd to Believe and Live as they "ought to do, by those Discoveries which God "hath made, and those Commands which he "hath given to them in Scripture, would stand "out against any Evidence, any Application "whatsoever, even that of a Messenger, sent "Express from the other World, to inform and "reclaim them.

This Truth doth, I confess, carry a very surprising Sound with it, and is not likely to be entertain'd readily upon the first Proposal. That I may therefore set it in as clear a Light as is possible, I shall endeavour in what follows,

- I. To State and Limit the due Extent of it.
- II. To Confirm and Prove the Truth, so stated, by various Arguments and Reflections.
- III. To Deduce some Inferences from it.

As to the Extent of this Assertion, we may I. observe;

First,

First, That it is evidently to be understood of such Persons only, as are placed in the same Circumstances with the five Brethren of the Parable; such, consequently, as have been born, where the True Religion is profess'd, and bred up in the Belief of it; have had all the early Prejudices of Education on the side of Truth, and all manner of Opportunities and Advantages towards being acquainted with the Grounds of it; and yet, notwithstanding all these Advantages, have shut their Eyes against it, and withstood its Force. For as to Others, who have liv'd under the Guidance of Reason alone, without the Assistance of Supernatural Light, it is highly probable, that though *Moses* and the Prophets, [the Tenor of a Divine Revelation] when first propos'd to them, should not, yet Miracles, or a Message from the Dead, would persuade them; according to what is elsewhere laid down by our Saviour; That, *If the Mighty Works which were done in Chorazin and Bethsaida, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in Sackcloth and Ashes.*

Secondly, Neither is the Assertion to be rigorously extended even to All those, who have been educated under the Influence of a Divine Revelation, and yet liv'd in Opposition to the Rules of it: for there is great Reason to believe, that
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many Persons, who, through the Heat of their Lusts and Passions, through the Contagion of ill Example, or too deep an Immersion in the Affairs of Life, swerve exceedingly from the Rules of their Holy Faith; and yet would, upon such an extraordinary Warning as is mention'd in the Text, be brought to comply with them. But this Truth is pointed chiefly, if not solely; upon Sinners of the first Rate, who have cast off all Regard for Piety and Goodness; have set up for a Life of Sense, and are wicked by Principle: for such likewise those *Five Brethren* were; they liv'd in the same Degree of Luxury and Uncharitableness, as their dead Brother had done; they *heard not Moses and the Prophets*, believ'd nothing of Religion, of it's Threatnings, or it's Promises; look'd upon all Revelation as a Cheat, and all Pretenders to it as Impostors. Of such as these we must suppose the Text to affirm, that even a Message from the Dead would not be sufficient to reclaim them. We may observe,

Thirdly, That even of these profligate Creatures themselves it is not said, That so astonishing a Scene would make no manner of Impression, would have no present Influence upon them; but only, That it would not produce a lasting Effect, nor work a thorough Conversion.

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It is certain, that they would be very much rous'd and awaken'd by such a Sight; but they would not, however, be convinc'd and reform'd: *ἐμὴν* *ῥησιν*, says the Original; a Word of some Force, which seems to signifie, that they would scarce so far be wrought upon by it as to change their whole Mind and Course of Life, and to become New Creatures.

Regard being had to these several Restrictions, the Doctrine of the Text may, I think, be more fully represented to you after this manner;
 " That, where Men have been brought up in the
 " firm Belief of a Divine Revelation, and have
 " afterwards shaken it off, have reason'd them-
 " selves not only into a Disbelief, but a Contempt
 " of it, and given themselves up to *commit Iniquity*
 " *with greediness*; in such a case, the standing or-
 " dinary Means of Conviction failing to influence
 " them, it is not to be expected, that any extraor-
 " dinary Means, of what kind soever, should be
 " able to do it; no, not tho one should come
 " from the Dead on purpose to warn them of their
 " Danger. For, however such a Message might
 " startle and amaze them at the first, might for a
 " while put new Thoughts, new Resolutions into
 " them; yet it would work no Total Change:
 " They, who were absolute Infidels before such
 " a Message, would, in all probability, continue
 " Infidels still. Which

Which Truth, thus largely explain'd and stated, I go on now, on my

Ild General Head, to Confirm and prove to you by various Arguments and Reflections. And,

II.

First, we will Suppose that such a Message from the Dead as That, for which the Rich Man here intercedes, is really in it self an Argument of greater strength and force to perswade a Sinner out of the Error of his Ways, than any standing Revelation, how well soever attested and confirmed: I will shew, nevertheless, that it would not be comply'd with. Because,

1st It is not for want of Strength, that the standing Ordinary ways of Proof are rejected, but for want of Sincerity and a disinterested Mind in those to whom they are propos'd; and the same want of Sincerity, the same adhesion to Vice, and aversion from Goodness, will be equally a Reason for their rejecting any Proof whatsoever. The Evidence, they had before, was enough, amply enough to convince them; but they were resolv'd not to be convinc'd: and to Those, who are resolv'd not to be convinc'd, all Motives, all Arguments are equal. He that shuts his Eyes against a small glimmering Light, on purpose to avoid the Sight of somewhat that displeases him, would (for the same reason) shut them also against the Sun it self; and not be brought to see that, which he had no mind to see, let it be plac'd in never

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so clear a Light, and never so near him. The Truth is, such Men understand by their Wills; and believe a thing True, or False, meerly as it agrees, or disagrees with a violent Inclination: and, therefore, whilst that Inclination lasts in it's strength, they discern nothing of the different degrees of Evidence, nor distinguish at all between a weak Motive and a strong one. But,

2^{dly}, A Motive, however stronger in it self than Another, may yet make a weaker Impression, when employ'd, after that the Motive of less, though sufficient, strength hath been already resisted. For the Mind doth, by every degree of affected Unbelief, contract more and more of a general Indisposition towards Believing: so that such a Proof, as would have been clos'd with certainly at the first, shall be set aside easily afterwards, when a Man hath been us'd to dispute himself out of plain Truths, and to go against the Light of his own Understanding. 'Tis in Infidelity, as in a vicious Course of Life; a sturdy hardned Sinner shall advance to the utmost pitch of Impiety with less difficulty, less reluctance of Mind, than perhaps he took first steps in a Wickedness, whilst his Conscience was yet Vigilant and Tender. Should, therefore, the Evidence of one rising from the Dead be in it self more powerful than that of the standing Gospel-Proofs, yet, we

we see, it would operate as little, or less than they, upon a Person who had beforehand rejected those Proofs. Nay,

3^{dly}, The peculiar Strength of the Motive will itself contribute to frustrate the Efficacy of it; as it makes it liable to be suspected by Him to whom it is address'd. He is conscious, how little he hath deserv'd so Extraordinary a Privilege; how much rather he hath deserv'd to have the Ordinary Means of Grace withdrawn, which he hath so long baffled and defy'd: and he will, therefore, as soon as his first Surprise is over, justly begin to wonder, how such a Favour came to be bestow'd on him; why God should, for His sake, do what perhaps was never before done, since the Foundations of the World were laid; should reverse the Laws of Nature, merely to produce an Effect, which tends rather to spread the Interests of Irreligion than stop the Growth of it; which encourages Men to be as vicious as they can, in order to qualify themselves for God's greatest Indulgencies and Mercies: for that (he well knows) is His only Qualification. He will conclude, therefore, That there must have been some Mistake, or Delusion in this Matter. It might be a meer Dream, which he saw, the Imagery of a Melancholick Fancy, such as now and then presents itself to Musing, Thoughtful

Thoughtful Men, when their Spirits are low, and the Spleen hath gotten Possession of them; and such as they mistake at that Time for a Reality, though they are afterwards satisfy'd, that it had no Existence any where but in their Own disorder'd Imagination.

Or, if he cannot help believing, that such things he saw and heard, he may still have room to believe, That, what this Airy Phantasm said, is not absolutely to be rely'd on: for it might be one of those Ill-natur'd Beings, who are at Enmity with Mankind, and do therefore take Pleasure in disturbing and perplexing their Minds, and filling them with Vain and Groundless Terrors. Or it might, after all, be one of his jocund Unbelieving Acquaintance [now alive,] dress'd up in such a Form, and acting such a Part, on purpose to get the Advantage of his Credulity, and to expose him.

But whoever, or whatever it was, 'tis not conceivable that it should be indeed that very Person, whose Shape and Voice it assum'd: for if there be any such thing as Hell, he is certainly tormented in the Flames of it. And while he is so, can it be imagin'd that he should either be enough at ease, or have Concern and Compassion enough for his surviving Friends, to contrive such Expedients for their Recovery? and b

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that means defeat himself of the Pleasure he may one day hope for in their Company? Damn'd Spirits do not, surely, use to entertain such charitable Designs: They must needs be all Envy, Despair, and Rage; and have so much of the Diabolical Nature in them, as to wish rather that all Men should share, than endeavour that any should escape their Torments.

For these and many other Reasons, which the Evil Spirit, who is ever ready to assist Men's Doubts, on these Occasions, will be sure to infuse, he'll suspend his Judgment of this strange Event a while, till he hath consider'd farther of it. In the mean time, during this Suspence, the Heat of the Impression abates, and that of his Lusts and Passions returns; and then 'tis odds but the Scale turns at last on Nature's side, and the Evidence of One or Two Senses gives way to the United Bent and Tendency of all the Five. Especially if it be consider'd,

4^{thly}, How far these Suspensions of his will be improv'd and heighten'd by the Railery and Laughter he will be sure to meet with, on this Head, from his old Friends and Companions. We may imagin, what a Reception they would give to such a Story, and the Teller of it; how many pleasant and gay Things they would say on this serious Occasion: which will have

have so much the keener Edge, in the present case, because they are turn'd upon One, who, 'tis probable, hath taken the like Liberties before; hath himself laugh'd with them on this very Supposition as loudly, and ridicul'd such *Idle Tales* as heartily as any Man. They will be sure, therefore, to put him in mind of his own waking Thoughts, e'er these Dreams had as yet made their Impression on his Fancy, and to encounter him with those Reasonings, and that Scorn, with which he us'd to encounter others, on the like Occasions; till they have made him ashamed first to Vouch the Truth of the Relation, and afterwards even to credit it. For, when a Man is surrounded on all sides with Opposition and Contempt for believing, what he himself would not have believ'd, upon the Relation of another, and what, for his Vices sake, he passionately wishes he may not have reason to believe; 'tis not hard to imagin, how he may be brought to give up the clearest Evidence, and suffer himself to be disputed out of his Senses. But if all these Engines fail of doing the Work; yet,

Lastly, Time, and a Succession of other Objects will bring it about. Every day the Impression loses somewhat of it's Force, and grows weaker, till at length it comes to lie under the same Disadvantage with the standing Proofs of the Gospel, that

that is, to be distant ; and, accordingly, to operate also (as those, and all other distant things do) but faintly upon careless unawaken'd Minds. They who attend sick Beds will tell you, how often they have met with Cases not unlike this ; wherein Men, upon the near approach of Death, have been rouz'd up into such a lively Sense of their Guilt, such a passionate degree of Concern and Remorse, that, if ten thousand Ghosts had appear'd to them, and Hell it self had been laid open flaming to their View, they could scarce have a fuller Conviction, or a greater Dread of their Danger : and yet, no sooner had the Distemper left them, but their good Thoughts and Resolutions began to leave them too, till they had at last, perhaps, forgotten their first Fears and Agonies as much as if they had never felt them, their solemn Vows and Promises as thoroughly as if they had never made them. Thus, in all likelihood, would it be with the Libertine, who should have such a Visit from the other World. The first Horror and Astonishment it rais'd, would go off by degrees, as new Thoughts, new Diversions came on ; it would be driven out by Business, or Pleasure, or the various Accidents of Life that might afterwards befall him ; till at last he came perhaps to reflect upon it with as much Indifference as if it were a Story only, which he had heard, or

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read, and which he himself was no ways concern'd in.

Hitherto I have Suppos'd, That the Evidence of one Arisen from the Dead hath really the Advantage, in point of Force and Efficacy, of any standing Revelation, how well soever attested and confirm'd; and, proceeding on that Supposition, I have endeavour'd to shew, That it ought not, however, to be granted, because it would certainly not be comply'd with. But the Truth is, and, upon a fair Ballance of the Advantages on either side, it will appear, that the common standing Proofs of the Gospel, are a more probable and powerful Means of Conviction, than any such Message, or Miracle; And that,

1st, For this plain Reason, Because they include in them that very kind of Evidence, which is suppos'd to be so powerful; and do, withal, afford us several other Additional Proofs, of great Force and Clearness.

Among many Arguments, by which the Truth of our Religion is made out to us, This is but One, that the Promulgers of it, *Christ Jesus* and his Apostles, did this very thing which is requir'd to be done, raised Men and Women from the Dead, not once only, but often, in an indisputable manner, and before many

many Witnesses. St. Peter rais'd Dorcas, our Saviour rais'd the Ruler's Daughter, the Widow's Son, and Lazarus; the first of these, when he had just expir'd; the second, as he was carried to the Grave on his Bier; and the third, after he had been some time buried: and having, by these gradual Advances, manifested his Divine Power, he at last exerted the highest and most glorious Degree of it, and rais'd Himself also, by his Own All-quicken- ing Virtue, and according to his Own express Prediction. We did not indeed see these things done; but we have such Authentick Accounts of them, that we can no more doubt of their having been done, than if we had actually seen them. For though no Evidence affects the Fancy so strongly as that of Sense; yet there is Other Evidence, which gives as full Satisfaction, and as clear a Conviction to Our Reason: so that there are some distant Matters of Fact, of the Truth of which we are as certain, as we are of what happens before our Eyes; the concurring Accounts of many such Witnesses, as were every way qualified to inform us, and could have no Interest in deceiving us, and seal'd the Truth of their Testimony with their Blood, rendring it (*Morally*, as we speak, or, as we might speak) *Absolutely*

impossible that these things should be false. And what can we say more for the Evidence that comes by the Senses? for can any thing be more certain than That, which 'tis impossible should not be true? And of this nature are many of those miraculous Facts, upon which the Truth of our Religion is founded; particularly, that most important Miracle of all, the Resurrection of our Lord: It is so convincingly attested, by such Persons, with such Circumstances, that They, who give themselves leisure to consider and weigh the Testimony, at what distance soever they are plac'd from the Fact itself, cannot help closing with it, nor entertain any more Doubt of the Resurrection, than they do of the Crucifixion of Jesus. And therefore, I say, if this Miracle of Christ's Rising from the Dead *heretofore* be not sufficient to convince a resolv'd Libertine, neither would the raising of one *now* from the Dead be sufficient for that Purpose; since it would only be doing that over again which hath been done already, and of the Truth of which (all things consider'd) we have as much reason to be satisfied, as if we ourselves had stood by and seen it.

Thus far the Old standing Proofs of the Gospel, and the New Miracle demanded are (in reality and right Reason) Equal; and should therefore (reasonably) have Equal Influence and Effect.

But

But there are also several other Accessory Proofs, by which the Truth of the Gospel was farther demonstrated. It was attested by Miracles of all sorts, done in great Variety and Number; by the visible centring of all the Old Prophecies in the Person of Christ, and by the Completion of those Prophecies since, which He himself utter'd; by the Holy and Unblemish'd Lives, the Constant Sufferings and Deaths of the Publishers of this Religion, and by the surpassing Excellence of that Heavenly Doctrine which they publish'd; finally, by the miraculous Increase of the Professors of Christianity, without any visible Grounds and Causes, and contrary to all human Probability and Appearance. Now, if the Proof of a future State by an immediate Appearance of one from the Dead be (in truth, and at the bottom) but Equal to that single Proof of Christianity, taken from our Lord's Resurrection; how much inferior must it be to these several Proofs United? and, therefore, how little Probability is there that He, who is not wrought upon by the one, would be convinc'd by the other? But I have not time to pursue this fruitful Head of Argument as far as it deserves; by displaying, first, the General Evidences of our Religion in all their Force and Brightness, and, then, comparing them with That of a particular Apparition; and, by this means,

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Calculating, as it were, the several Degrees of Credibility and Conviction, by which the One of these surpasseth the Other. Such an Attempt would carry me beyond the Bounds of a single Discourse. I have Room only at present to suggest a General Reflection or two, which may contribute to illustrate this Point; and proceed therefore to observe,

2dly, Another great Advantage which the standing Proofs of the Gospel have over such an Extraordinary Appearance; in as much as This hath all its Force at once, upon the first Impression, and is ever afterwards in a declining State; so that the longer it continues upon the Mind, and the oftner it is thought of, the more it loses; whereas Those, on the contrary, gain Strength and Ground upon us by Degrees, and the more they are consider'd and weigh'd, the more they are approv'd.

There is a like Difference between the ways in which these several Proofs operate, as there is between the several Impressions made upon Thoughtful Minds by the Works of Art and of Nature. The Works of Art, which are most nice and curious, strike and surprize us most upon the first View; but the better acquainted we are with them, the less we wonder at them: Whereas the Works of Nature will bear a
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Thousand Views and Reviews, and will still appear new to us. The more frequently and narrowly we look into them, the more occasion we shall have to admire their fine and subtle Texture, their Beauty, and Use, and Excellent Contrivance. The same may we say of the standing Evidences of the Gospel; Every time they are consider'd and enquir'd into, they gain upon sincere unbiass'd Minds, appear still more Reasonable and Satisfactory than before, and more worthy every way of that inimitable Power and Skill which wrought them; and, on that Account, they are, doubtless, better contriv'd to work a rational, a deep, and durable Conviction in us, than those Astonishing Motives are, which exert all their Force at once, upon the first proposal. An Argument, that will take sure hold of the Understanding, must be some time working it's way into it; as those Trees, which have the slowest Growth, are, for that Reason, of the longest Continuance. To all which we may add in the

3^d Place, That, let the Evidence of such a particular Miracle be never so bright and clear, yet it is still but Particular; and must therefore want that kind of Force, that Degree of Influence, which accrues to a standing General

ral Proof, from its having been try'd, and approv'd, and consented to by Men of all Ranks and Capacities, of all Tempers and Interests, of all Ages and Nations. A Wise Man is then best satisfy'd with his own Reasonings and Persuasions, when he finds that Wise and Considering Men have in the like manner Reason'd, and been in like manner Persuaded; that the same Argument, which weighs with Him, hath weigh'd with Thousands and Ten thousand times ten thousands before him; and is such as hath born down all Opposition, wherever it hath been fairly propos'd, and calmly consider'd. Such a Reflection, though it carries nothing perfectly Decisive in it, yet creates a mighty Confidence in his Breast, and strengthens him much in his Opinion. Whereas he who is to be wrought upon by a special Miracle, hath no Helps, no Advantages of this kind toward clearing his Doubts, or supporting his Assurance. All the Force of the Motive lies entirely within it self; it receives no Collateral Strength from External Considerations, it wants those degrees of Credibility that spring from Authority and concurring Opinions: which is one Reason why (as I told you) a Man is capable of being disputed out of the Truth and Reality of such a Matter of Fact, though he saw it with his Eyes.

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This, therefore, is a farther Advantage, which the standing Proofs of a Revelation have over any Occasional Miracle; That the admitting the One is but the falling in with the General Sense and Persuasion of those among whom we converse; whereas the Other cannot be asserted, without incurring the Scorn and Derision, at least, not without running cross to the Belief and Apprehension of the rest of Mankind: a Difficulty, which (as hath been already shewn) a modest good Man is scarce Able, but a Man addicted to his Vices is neither Able nor Willing, for the meer sake of Truth, to encounter.

Let us lay these several Reflections together, and we shall find, " That even a Message from " the other World is not an Argument of such invincible Strength, but that it would be resisted " by such as had beforehand resisted the General " Proofs of the Gospel; and that our Saviour, " therefore, utter'd no Paradox, but a great, a clear, " and certain Truth, when he said, That they, who hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the Dead. From which Truth it is now Time, as my

III^d. General Head directs, to deduce the several Inferences which I intended. And,

III.

First, We learn from hence, what is the true Use and End of Miracles: They are not Private,

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but Publick Proofs; not Things to be done *in a Corner*, for the sake of single Persons, but before Multitudes, and in the Face of the Sun. Again, They are Signs to those who believe not, not to those who believe: I mean, that the Great, the Chief End of them is, to establish the Truth of a New Revelation in those Countries where it is first promulg'd and propagated; not to Confirm Men in the Belief of it, after it is sufficiently establish'd. Miracles are the immediate Act of Omnipotence, and, therefore, not to be employ'd, but where the Importance of the Occasion absolutely requires them: much less are they to be employ'd, where they are neither requisite, nor likely to succeed; as the case is, where Those, who are not convinc'd by the Old Miracles, demand New ones. It follows from hence,

Secondly, That we have great reason to look upon the high Pretensions which the *Roman Church* makes to Miracles, as groundless, and to reject her Vain and Fabulous accounts of them. Half the Saints, which have place in her peculiar Calendar, were, if you will believe Her, converted by Miracles; Apparitions, Visions, and Intercourses of all kind between the Dead and the Living, are the frequent and familiar Embellishments of those pious Romances, her Legends; which exceed the Scripture it self in Wonders, and
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do indeed, by that means contradict the Doctrine and Design of it: for where *Moses* and the Prophets are receiv'd, there a continu'd Succession of Miracles is needless; and, consequently, not to be expected, believ'd, or pretended. It may be a

Third Use of what hath been said, to take an occasion from thence of Considering, how *sure the Foundation of God standeth*, [*that Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, upon which the Church is built, Jesus Christ himself being the Head Corner-stone, as the Collect for this Day speaks*]; how very strong and irrefragable the first Evidences of Christianity needs must be, since they appear (both from Reason and Revelation) to be such, as that They, who resisted them, would resist every thing besides them. But this is sufficiently understood from the whole Tenour of the preceding Argument; Which instructs us also, in the

Fourth Place, to condemn the Folly and Impiety of those Persons (for such there have been) who have oblig'd themselves to each other, to appear after Death, and give an account of their Condition in another World; and the worse Use that hath been made of these Ill Contracts, when the surviving Party hath harden'd himself in his Wickedness, upon the Others Failure. It is stupidly foolish, thus to venture our Salvation upon an Experiment, which we know not

whether God will suffer, and which, we have all the Reason imaginable to think, he will not suffer to take place. It is highly Impious, to resolve to persist in our Unbelief, till something more is done for our Conviction, than God hath thought fit should be done for the Conviction of any Man in our Circumstances. An Apostle indeed once said, *Except I shall see in his Hands the Print of the Nails, and put my Finger into the Print of the Nails, and thrust my Hand into his side, I will not believe*; and God was pleas'd to stoop to his Request, and to plant the Faith in his Heart by such an Experiment. But it was on the account of the Publick Character he wasto bear, as an Apostle, that is, a Witness of the Resurrection of Christ to the rest of the World; and it might, therefore, be fit, that He himself should, in a very Particular and Extraordinary way, be satisfy'd of it; not merely for his Own sake, but for the sake of all Those who should afterwards believe in his Testimony. The manner of his Conviction was design'd, not as a peculiar Privilege to Him; but as a standing Miracle, a lasting Argument for the Conviction of Others, to the very End of the World. Besides, though slow of Belief, he was at the bottom Honest and Sincere; not led into these Doubts by his Lusts and Vices, not a Revolter from the Truth which he had once embrac'd:

brac'd: And they, therefore, have no Reason to expect to be favour'd, as He was, who stand not possess'd of any One of those Qualifications that belong'd to him, but are (generally speaking) the very Reverse of his Character.

Fifthly, From the same Truth we may also be taught to correct a Vain Thought, which we are sometimes apt to entertain; That, if it had been Our Lot to converse with Christ and his Apostles, and to be Eye-witnesses of their Miracles; we should, by such an Advantage, have been secur'd from any Degree of Doubt or Infidelity: Whereas certain it is, that They, who, at this Distance from the first Rise of the Gospel, after weighing the several Evidences of it, waver in their Faith, would have waver'd, though they had seen the first Promulgers of it work Wonders. Even that Sight itself did not hinder many, to whom the Gospel was first preach'd, from turning it into *Lasciviousness*, and denying the Lord Jesus, as St. Jude complains. Deceiv'd we are, if we think, that God hath not furnish'd every Age of the Church with sufficient Inducements to receive the Faith; and the latest Ages, perhaps, with the strongest Inducements to it. Indeed, the Lustre of the Primitive Miracles is now wanting to us: but then we are freed also from several Inconveniences, under which the first Christians labour'd, and

and we enjoy likewise several Advantages which they wanted. We have no Original Prejudices against the Gospel, to subdue, as They had; for we have been educated in the Belief of it: We are not tempted, as They were, to revolt from it by the Dread of Dangers and Death; for all manner of Encouragements attend Our Profession of it. The miraculous Success of the Apostles Preaching, and the Accomplishment of many of their Predictions, which to those early Christians were Matters of Faith only, are to Us Matters of Sight and Experience. And we, that live at the greatest Distance from the Age of the Apostles, have in this the Advantage of such as were much nearer to them; That even these last and worst of times have produc'd the best Apologies for our Faith, the most Accurate, and Rational, and Unanswerable Accounts of the Truth of Christianity. To apply, therefore, the Words of Solomon to the present case; *Say not thou, What is the Cause that the Former Days were better than These? for thou dost not enquire wisely of this thing.*

The *Last* Inference, which the Doctrine deliver'd suggests to us, is, That we should from thence be invited to magnifie and to adore the Divine Wisdom, which hath so order'd the first Proofs and Evidences of our Faith, that they will be equally satisfactory and convincing to the End
of

of the World. I know (saith the Wise Man) that whatsoever God doth, it shall be for ever : nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it ; and God doth it that Men should fear before him. Eccl. iii. 14. Accordingly, he hath propos'd a standing Revelation, so well confirm'd by Miracles, once for all, that it should be needless to recur to them ever afterwards for the Conviction of any Man, who was born within the Pale of Christianity. This was the shortest, the fittest, and wisest way that could have been taken ; the best suited to the Majesty of God, and to the other Methods of his Providence ; and the most accommodated also to the Nature, Capacities, and Interest of Men. It had been below him, by an Immediate Interposition of his Omnipotence, to have been appealing every day to his Creatures for the Truth of his Religion ; an Endless, and an Unbecoming Task, to be put upon offering supernatural Proofs, for the Conviction of Impious Men, as often as their Infidelity should be pleas'd to demand them ! Not so doth he proceed in the Government of the Natural World : He made it, indeed, at the first, after a Miraculous and Incomprehensible manner ; but he steers and directs the Affairs of it, ever since, by standing Rules and Laws ; and by the Ordinary Ministry of Second Causes. With Equal Wisdom hath he Temper'd the Conduct

duct of the Moral World also. For, though he usher'd in the Mosaic and Christian Institutions by a great Variety of amazing Signs and Wonders; yet, as soon as the Truth of those Revelations was thus illustriously manifested, and the Accounts of these things were committed to Writing, Miracles in great measure ceas'd; and the Appeal afterwards was to the written Word [*to the Law, and to the Testimony*], which supply'd the Room of them.

Indeed, Motives that address themselves coolly to our Reason, are fittest to be employ'd upon Reasonable Creatures: It is no ways congruous, that God should be always frightening and astonishing Men into an Acknowledgment of the Truth, who were made to be wrought upon by calm Evidence, and gentle Methods of Persuasion. Should such a Miracle be indulg'd to One, Others would think themselves equally entitled to it; and, if indulg'd to many, it would no longer have the Effect of a Miracle, it's Force and Influence would be lost by the Frequency of it. Or, supposing it to continue in its full-Strength, how often soever repeated; yet the Faith it produc'd would not be so free and voluntary an Act, as That ought to be, to which are annex'd all the Glorious and Invaluable Privileges of Believing. In a word, Good Men have no need of a Miracle;

cle; for they are convinc'd without it: And it would be of dangerous Consequence to the Bad; for They, we find, would not, even with it, be convinc'd. And, therefore, the Allowance of such a Favour to them would serve only to render them more Obdurate, and more Inexcusable; it would enhance their Guilt, and increase their Condemnation.

Let us then from these, and such Considerations as these, be led to reverence the Infinite Wisdom and Goodness of God, in all his Transactions with Men! Let us learn, not to dispute the Methods of his Providence; but humbly and implicitly to acquiesce in them, and to adore them! Let us satisfy our selves, That every thing is certainly order'd by Him after the aptest, and best, and most becoming manner, though our First Apprehensions should suggest otherwise to us; and that no Contrivance, no Policy, no Prudence whatsoever, can in any respect deviate from his Scheme, without leaving us in a much worse Condition than it found us! For

Great and Marvellous are thy Works, Lord God Almighty! Just and True are All thy Ways, thou King of Saints!

To Thee, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be render'd, as is most due, all possible Honour, Adoration, and Praise, now, and for Ever!

F I N I S.

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